



School of Education
Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
St Luke's Campus
EXETER EX1 1TE
UK

Email dave.walters@groundedpractice.co.uk
Web <https://education.exeter.ac.uk/>

Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Notting Hill Prep for the purpose of re-accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, School of Education, University of Exeter, UK.

Evidence base

The criteria for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School starts from the assumption that all the criteria for the first level of accreditation by Thinking Schools@Exeter continue to be met within the ongoing practices of the community. The second level of evaluation further assumes that the original criteria for recognition as a 'Thinking School' have now become so embedded that staff and students have developed a deeper understanding of the principles of cognitive education and its impact on both their individual learning and its potential contribution to society. Much of the evidence referenced in this report reflects the significant and sustained progress the school has made in its on-going journey as a thinking and learning community and follows on from the previous accreditation as a level 2 Thinking School.

The focus for this second level of evaluation turns towards the presentation of evidence as to how the school has moved forward in seeking to achieve those aims. Evidence has been sought on teaching (and support) staff's developing skills as practitioners; their impact on the overall development of the students beyond their technical skills in the use of the tools; and their continuing impact on the community of the whole school and beyond. Five key areas for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School have been assessed: Dissemination of Practice; Evaluative Research; Professional Development; Differentiation; and Whole School Assessment.

The University of Exeter received the school's submission for re-accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School from Notting Hill Prep (NHP) in the form of a Reflective Proforma with evidence links, extensively illustrating the continuing work the school is undertaking as a level 1 Thinking School together with how it has continued to move forward as a level 2 Thinking School. School evidence includes pupils' work, examples of displays and posters, relevant sections of the school improvement plan, Headteacher reports, photographs, newsletters, project plans, video evidence, Drive Team documentation, action plans, meetings minutes, learning walks observations, other data. From the evidence provided, it is clear that the school exceeds the Level 1 Thinking School criteria, and the focus of this report will be on continued development of the school on the basis of the level 2 criteria.

Starting point: the school context

NHP is a popular and highly successful coeducational independent day school with 435 pupils on roll. The school has a long history of Thinking School development. Indeed, thinking is captured prominently in the school's founding strapline, 'Thinking and Thriving Since 2003'. Accreditation has been at the core of the NHP for many years with Level 1 accreditation being awarded in 2014 and Level 2 in 2021.¹ The school has sustained its Thinking School development superbly and has gone from strength to strength by continually refreshing its focus and building progressively on its initiatives. It is clear from the evidence provided that NHP has built fully on the recommendations for development arising from previous evaluations. Indeed, the school has gone well beyond in this respect. NHP is a school where every individual is encouraged to achieve excellence. The school's ethos is encapsulated in a very straightforward rubric; 'Academic rigour + the joy of childhood = NHP'. These principles are further illustrated in NHP's four key values:

- Wonder (the development of curiosity)
- Challenge (moving out of one's comfort zone)
- Self-knowledge (together with self-actualisation)
- Community (appreciating diversity and complexity).

¹ School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence

NHP clearly places the individual child at the centre of its work.

In aligning the school's vision and values to a metacognitive developmental process, NHP has ensured that the Thinking Schools approach is a firm and secure part of the learning culture of the entire school. The school achieves excellent pupil outcomes as demonstrated by a wealth of robust indicators. This is indicative of an educational provision that serves the wider needs of all pupils. NHP is rated 'Outstanding' by its most recent ISI inspection report with all key areas receiving particular attention for exceptional quality. NHP is clearly a school that prides itself in achieving and maintaining the highest educational standards. In addition, the school has an excellent reputation for supporting students through its inclusive pastoral system together with an outstanding extra-curricular and enrichment offering. These achievements reflect the school's drive for sustained holistic development, together with an unwavering commitment to lifelong learning for all.²

The school's cognitive education development journey has moved forward unswervingly since its previous accreditation. Subsequently, a clear thread of training has been in place. The recent progressive cycle of Lesson Study is particularly impressive in terms of innovative pedagogy and includes:

- Building Attitude, Method, Organisation, Reflection and Environment
- The Science Behind Memory
- Embodied Cognition
- Intertwining Behaviour Management and Thinking Strategies.

Indeed, Thinking Schools principles are fully embedded in the NHP Thinking Toolbox that includes Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, Philosophy for Children (P4C), and NHP Habits (customised Habits of Mind geared towards self-development and wellbeing). Parents and carers form an exceptional partnership with NHP in terms of the teaching and learning provision.³

² Ibid

³ Digital evidence

The school's aims and ethos have a clear focus on excellence for all pupils. What sets NHP aside from many schools, is its emphasis on *how* this is achieved. With reference to this, the school seeks to make learning irresistible by developing children as creative, adaptable and resilient thinkers so that they become committed lifelong learners.⁴ NHP has embedded thinking and meta-cognitive approaches in all aspects of school life in order to ensure that its aims and ethos are a reality. High quality CPD has done much to secure a cohesive staff team and there is a real sense of collaboration at all levels.⁵

Dissemination of practice

For this area of accreditation, we assess the way in which the school can demonstrate evidence of sharing their Thinking Schools practice and experiences across subject areas with others. There is extensive evidence of sharing practice within the school, across subjects and teams, with all sections of staff participating in formal and informal staff training events and programmes. Parents and support staff are fully included via a range of training events. The 'Back to School' sessions provide parents with first-hand experience of the Thinking School approach geared towards the holistic development of children. There is ample evidence of effective dissemination of tools, but also a focus on differentiation. There is a rich blend of qualitative data that contributes well to the collaborative dissemination of best practice. This includes casual observations, pupil interviews and vibrant displays. The Thinking School Lead co-ordinates a wealth of training and support and is particularly influential in the dissemination process, including contributing to publications. As a Thinking Schools National Hub School, NHP hosts visits, leads conference sessions (regionally and nationally). As such, there is a clear whole school understanding of children's learning progress in both qualitative and quantitative domains.

Teachers and support staff are fully involved in dissemination activities. The termly NHP Hub Meetings are particularly innovative and provide high quality support via high quality evidence informed reflection. Regionally, NHP leads on Collaborative Partnerships and Community Engagement together with hosting open events for aspiring Thinking Schools. A

⁴ School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence

⁵ Ibid

variety of staff lead high quality webinars with a Thinking Schools focus and nationally these extend to online Drive Team meetings and conference input. On an international level, the school has welcomed visits from a variety of global educators. The use of expert groups to share knowledge and expertise is particularly effective and the recent Collaborative Article Series stands as a model of outstanding practice. Here, the school's 'Move in School' research is set to feature in national and international publications. As a result, NHP disseminates high impact practice across internal subject areas, the local community, cluster schools, nationally and internationally.

All new staff receive training in theory, pedagogy, and practical approaches relating to Thinking. There is an extensive and innovative range of resources and structures to further support the dissemination of Thinking School approaches and students are pivotal to disseminating best practice. Judicious timelines ensure that the process of dissemination is planned and actioned effectively. Conferences and associated workshops further add to the school's process of dissemination.⁶

Evaluative research

This area of evaluation is particularly concerned with the ways in which staff are seeking evidence of the positive impact and outcomes of the Thinking Schools approach and how this evidence is used to drive whole school learning and improvement. Based on the evidence of Level 1 and level 2 criteria, there is a continuing and wide-ranging programme of evaluation within the school. This includes specific consideration of the process and impact of initiatives on the learning and development of pupils. Evaluative Research is embedded in the working practices of the entire school. NHP utilises a range of data collection tools including thinking tools audits, focused staff meetings, PASS analysis, and pupil / teacher reflections. The Drive Team play a pivotal role in coordinating data collection and the subsequent analyses. The recent Cycle of Lesson Study has had a wealth of innovative foci such as Embodied Cognition. The Drive Team lead on lesson observations and facilitate evaluative reflective feedback. The proactive involvement of the Pupil Voice via the School Council and other pupil leadership forums ensures that evaluative research has an inductive as well as deductive dimension.

⁶ Reflective proforma and digital evidence

PASS is used formatively to inform and evaluate the impact of research-based interventions and this process has undergone astute development.

Evaluative Research at NHP has clear, succinct parameters outlining what is being studied, who is being studied, together with associated timeframe. This is an excellent example of the school's commitment to delivering practitioner research excellence. Of particular note, is the regular feedback of evaluations to Governors and other key stakeholders. Together, this has done much to secure an ongoing cycle of Thinking School development. Findings from research have directly influenced the work of the NHP Drive Team and staff across the school, and the cycle of Lesson Study feeds into the process well. Quality Assurance and ongoing support is provided extremely effectively by high-quality 'external' consultants and stands as an excellent example of integrating internal and external evaluative processes. Evidence is presented that demonstrates the ongoing collection of data related to Thinking Skills across the school, in particular with respect to how well Thinking Skills are embedded within the school system and what the impact is on pupils and staff. It is clear that there are effective strategies in place across subject areas that encourage and support evaluation and reflective practice of learning and teaching approaches and impact.⁷

The Drive Team provide a skilful and rich representation of expertise from across the school so that new ideas for teaching and learning are explored, researched and, if successful, fed back to the wider staff body. Furthermore, Thinking Skills and dispositional development are part of ongoing evaluations of pupil progress, providing further evidence of the ongoing evaluation of Thinking Skills approaches throughout the school. It is important to note in this respect, that pupils are routinely consulted about what the Thinking Tools mean to them. Another important factor within the continuous evaluation of the outcomes of taking a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking, is the evidence of the development of pupil resilience and self-reflection, as well as a sense of shared responsibility towards one another. The focus on the development of the whole child is a particularly strong aspect of school life at NHP. Evaluation has a focus on impact, and this indicates that the Thinking School approach

⁷ Reflective Proforma and digital evidence

has a clear impact on the positive learning outcomes and behaviours of the whole school community.⁸

Professional development

Evidence of professional development concerns two key issues: technical, in the practical application of a range of thinking tools; and qualitative demonstrated by the quality of staff as mediators.

In terms of technical development, it is clear from the school development planning that new members of staff are routinely training in Thinking Skills. CPD has been effectively framed as a collaborative process. The highly effective use of a range of professional development forums such as Professional Reviews, (holistic integration of Thinking Skills), Teams Channel Information, Termly CPD, and the Tooled-Up Education Membership stand as a model of professional growth excellence on a school wide level. The clear and integrated curriculum is outstanding. Thinking School principles are fully integrated and this does much to aid the overall coherence of the pedagogical aims. There is an excellent induction programme in place and ensures that professional development opportunities are consistent and well embedded in the culture of the entire school. New staff are automatically trained in all the thinking tools and associated pedagogy. This is wonderfully supplemented by the provision of opportunities to shadow, discuss and observe lessons conducted by lead practitioners.

The Drive Team Lead evaluates the Thinking School action plan via regular ongoing analyses of quantitative and qualitative data. This feeds into high quality targeted professional development activities. Indeed, the Drive Team has an excellent blend of highly skilled leaders. Together, they provide exceptional leadership and professional development for all staff. Professional development has evolved into a reflective process model based on contextual need and application. The recent Cycle of Lesson Study focus on intertwining behaviour management and thinking strategies is just one of many high-quality

⁸ Ibid

developmental initiatives at NHP. This is evidence of the school's commitment and appreciation of the need to consider the specific setting for educational developments.

NHP has responded to the pandemic with unwavering commitment and resilience to keep the professional growth provision moving forward. Judicious ongoing evaluative research builds individual strengths and areas for development into whole school planning and actions. The Drive Team has regular focussed meetings with clear development action points that further feed into CPD linked to priorities. NHP provides a range of innovative bespoke resources for staff in order to operationalise the priorities. These excellent resources are supplemented by modelled examples so staff can actually see how they might apply what they have learned in their own classrooms. Pupil feedback plays an intrinsic part on development planning and is used to triangulate reflections, plans and actions. This has allowed the school to focus not so much on the use of specific Thinking Tools, but to provide a strong background and rationale for Thinking across subject areas, which demonstrates an excellent understanding and awareness of Thinking as a pedagogic strategy throughout the school.

Conference input and associated workshops are wonderfully organised and provide a wealth of rich and inspirational opportunities for professional growth. There is strong evidence of the continued focus of staff on the development of their own knowledge and understanding of Thinking and Thinking Skills approaches in general. Thinking Skills approaches are continually evaluated throughout the school and staff are routinely asked to reflect on their use of Thinking Tools. This again provides strong evidence that the use of Thinking Skills and the language around Thinking is strongly embedded within the school, the teaching practice and its overall ethos, such that the school's developmental influence is far reaching. It is clear, from the evidence provided that all staff are immediately made aware of this ethos and practice. Importantly, staff are given the time and resources to train and to work with colleagues through cycles of lesson observations. The parent workshops and webinar sessions for partner schools further extend the professional development reach of the school.⁹

⁹ Ibid

Differentiation

This area of accreditation includes the value of thinking tools in the education of specific individuals and groups. This includes a sensitivity to the individual needs of all the children in lessons, and a focus on developing autonomy and individuality in pupils' approaches to problem-solving. Through thorough and on-going dialogue with pupils, teachers are able to mediate learning such that learning is geared towards the needs of all pupils at an individual level, regardless of starting point or specific barriers to learning. Weekly and medium-term planning fully embrace differentiation and teaching clearly puts this into practice. As such, NHP has developed a unique culture of personalisation that goes beyond a 'broad-brush' approach to learning and teaching. The Thinking Toolbox and associated evaluations indicate high impact with the evaluations spanning whole school impact, individual lesson impact and pupil self-evaluations. In addition, the wider educational provision is excellent and evidence informed, such that children get personalised support. A variety of Thinking Tools are used adaptively to suit the abilities of different pupils. Progression is clearly mapped via an adaptive and responsive curriculum and all pupils are encouraged to develop individuality and autonomy. Indeed, the school's most recent inspection report further illustrates NHP's personalised approach. Pupil support is also highly personalised and adds significant value to the educational provision at NHP. Resources are carefully differentiated to enable all children to access tasks and displays are used actively to promote discussion related to the identification of thinking processes. The recent focus on intertwining behaviour management and thinking strategies is of particular note in terms of thinking strategies underpinning personal learning targets and behavioural goals. The Pupil Voice is a strong part of the learning culture of the school and means that teachers can identify what works best, for whom, under what circumstances, how and why.¹⁰

Whole School assessment

This aspect of the accreditation relates to pupils' and teachers' reflections upon their own and others' performance via assessment procedures, as well as critical reflection on Thinking Tools. Whole school assessment policy and practice are a core strength of the school.

¹⁰ Ibid

Assessment at NHP clearly integrates a range of Thinking Tools and approaches with self/peer reflections. The formative use of PASS provides a baseline from which progress can be monitored and the Thinking Toolbox dovetails well with this. This is an excellent example of how assessment is the servant rather than the master of the curriculum. Assessments again indicate high impact. Thinking tools such as Thinking Maps and Thinking Hats are also used effectively for assessment and evaluation purposes.

Evidence is sought for the reflective processes of staff through the emphasis of developing as a researching professional. Staff approach curriculum developments with evidence informed reflections. Pupils are encouraged to find meaning in a variety of thinking approaches such that they see the relevance and point of developing them. Assessment and evaluative information are shared school-wide to strengthen the consistency of effective teaching and learning strategies. A clear line of pupil feedback has been highly effective in identifying learning needs from the children's perspective. Parents are also involved in the monitoring process. They are supported well by the school and add significant value to the educational provision at NHP. NHP goes beyond using assessment as a summative indicator towards using it as a formative tool to support and enhance pupils' learning. At each juncture the aim of the school is to secure full and effective learning for all pupils. Staff are encouraged to reflect on the use of Thinking Tools and strategies and evidence demonstrates continuous reflection on the implementation, use, and impact of Thinking Tools.

Overall, it is clear that there are continuous formal and informal critical evaluations of Thinking Skills, Approaches and Tools taking place throughout NHP, which include a wide variety of stakeholders. This is a clear indicator of the way in which a culture of thinking is fully embedded within the school.¹¹

Points for further consideration

NHP has responded well to the points for further consideration suggested in the previous accreditation report. The developments relating to building attitude, memory science, embodied cognition, and intertwining behaviour management with thinking are good

¹¹ Reflective proforma and digital evidence

examples of this. I conclude my evaluation with some suggestions as to how the school could continue to develop as a Thinking School and possibly inform a development workshop to further aid action planning. This might include:

- Consider the work of Project Zero, particularly the research and materials by Ron Ritchhart as these provide a rich source of classroom ideas and real-time dynamic assessment practices to compliment the already excellent practice at NHP.
- Further develop evaluative research and align action research to the SPARE model. The SPARE model of evaluative action research is a useful framework through which to apply evaluative research at all levels of leadership and classroom practice and could easily be applied to NHP's current practice.
- Continue to use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of NHP. In particular, the extension of practitioner research through wider dissemination of the SPARE model of illuminative evaluation may provide a vehicle for further contextualising cognitive approaches to find out what works best, for whom, under what circumstances, how and why.
- Consider the further development of pupil and staff reflections via reflective journals. These may add to the already excellent data sources and supplement the exceptional assessment and evaluation practices.

Outcome

The substantive evidence provided by NHP creates a very clear picture of a Thinking School in which Thinking Skills are at the heart of school life. NHP is an inspirational and child-centred school. It brings its ethos and values into every facet of educational provision such that the pursuit of holistic lifelong learning is a reality. The school's commitment to continually develop as a Thinking School is modelled brilliantly through a wealth of collaborative partnerships and has influenced a number of schools locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. The fully inclusive collaborative approach to leadership, teaching and learning is exceptional and stands as a model of exemplary practice for other to emulate. The school

is an inclusive learning community in every sense and has managed to bring a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking to life. As such, the whole learning community develop as holistic lifelong learners in an ongoing way. NHP is clearly evidence-informed, and this is illustrative of a school that is committed to the highest standards of educational provision for all children. High achievement and wellbeing flourish because of an unswerving focus on holistic lifelong learning. It has been a pleasure to review the progress of the school. In conclusion, the application has provided compelling and comprehensive evidence for re-accreditation, and I therefore recommend that re-accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School be awarded until March 2027. Congratulations to Notting Hill Prep for an exceptional achievement!



Dr Dave Walters, BA Ed Hons, MPhil Ed, EdD
Thinking Schools Assessor
Grounded Practice Educational Services

On behalf of the University of Exeter, UK

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